

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

Hampton's Safe and Clean campaign marks return to basics of community life

By Mayor George Wallace and Vice Mayor Linda Curtis

There was a time when neighborhoods functioned like extended families. People looked after each other's children, took food to shut-in neighbors, looked outside when they heard a strange noise, and reported suspicious activity.

That's not just nostalgia: In Hampton's healthiest neighborhoods, this is still the case. Neighborhood associations, Crime Watch groups, PTAs, athletic teams, community centers, even Facebook groups provide centers of community life.

But in other neighborhoods, residents say they are less likely to leave their homes, to report suspicious activity or to know their neighbors. Some longtime homeowners have asked for help reversing declines in property values, safety and security.

Both of us have spent our careers in public service – and are back serving in retirement. Before becoming mayor, George Wallace was a professional in city management who shared best practices with managers across the state and country. Before becoming vice mayor, Linda Curtis prosecuted those charged with crimes, worked with victims and became involved in prevention services.

We'd like to share our combined perspective on healthy families, healthy neighborhoods and healthy cities, and give you the context Hampton's "Safe and Clean" campaign.

First, let's address how those two goals are related. We have seen firsthand the "broken window" theory. If a neighborhood or community tolerates a small decline – litter or graffiti even – many people see no reason not to join in, and the small problem gets bigger. Eventually, the tolerance for what is acceptable changes, drug dealers or other criminals decide it's a place they can call home, and the decline escalates.

We're not saying Hampton, or any of our neighborhoods, is like that. In fact, this community has stepped forward to say we won't allow that to happen. That, in essence, is where the Safe and Clean efforts begin, with a teamwork approach that includes codes inspectors, probation and parole officials, police and citizens who partner to ensure that the community standards are upheld.

The specific measures Hampton has enacted include:

- **Increased police patrols and a focus on community policing.** Increased use of technology will allow officers to spend less time on paperwork and more time on proactive patrols.
- **Revitalized Neighborhood Watch groups and business partnerships.** Improving relationships and communications to be more proactive and react quicker when incidents do occur.
- **An earlier curfew for those under 18, especially those under 14.** The vast majority of teens are not causing problems, but the curfew is a way of restricting those who are and helping others stay safe.
- **Limits on stays in hotels not set up for extended stays.** During hard economic times, some people have little recourse and end up living in a small hotel room without a real kitchen. Hampton's ordinance attempts to help the truly needy transition to a Social Service system that is set up to provide a safety net – one that offers stability and a path out of poverty. It also ensures that school-age children don't get lost in the shuffle and miss school.
- **Rental dwelling inspections.** Rentals are an important part of the housing mix. However, Hampton faces some particular challenges. In a few neighborhoods with a significant percentage of rentals, the housing stock is blighted or deteriorating. Housing inspectors, who have been able to inspect exterior code violations, will now be able to inspect interiors to ensure that rental properties have such necessities as functioning toilets, adequate heat, and windows that open and close. Improvements to the rental housing stock will improve neighborhood appearance and property values and ensure that all of our renters live in safe, decent and sanitary homes.

Hampton citizens and their leaders believe in working to improve the lives of those with few resources – through award-winning youth and family services; a streamlined Social Services staff cross-trained to administer all types of aid; a police department that protects and serves all residents; a veterans housing voucher program that offers long-term assistance to 325 of those who served our country; a school system that serves every child, every day; a public housing program that is proportionally larger than many of our neighboring localities; and a history of prosecuting and incarcerating those who refuse to live by community standards.

When answering an online survey about what they love about Hampton, residents offered up many attributes: our waterfront, history, shopping, entertainment, arts, and military-friendly environment. But always among the top attributes was this: Community.

Ultimately, that defines Hampton's spirit. We look out for, support and care for each other. Efforts like Safe and Clean help to remind us that we can all work together to maintain, strengthen and grow our community.

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